

COMMENTARY: White starting to take over (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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EVANSTON, Ill. – Three days ago after Iowa lost a nail-biter at home to No. 22 Michigan State, I mentioned how the Hawkeyes looked like a team missing that one leader just capable of taking over a game at any given moment.

That player, that leader, just may have emerged Sunday afternoon at a moment Iowa desperately needed one. Northwestern may have been and might end up proving to be a far lesser foe, but the Hawkeyes handled their business by beating the Wildcats 70-50 inside Welsh-Ryan Arena.

One of the biggest reasons why, in my opinion, was because of the performance given Sunday by sophomore forward Aaron White.

It wasn't that White played like his old self or anything like that. For the 29 minutes he was in the game, the 6-8 forward was the best player on the court.

White is a player being held to a higher standard now after the freshman year he had. After Iowa lost to No. 2 Michigan by 28 points, his defensive effort was called into question. In the Hawkeyes' most recent loss to Michigan State, it was White called for a foul on a 3-point attempt that led to Spartan guard Gary Harris sinking three free throws to tie a game that his team wound up winning by three points.

The pressure – if you want to even call it “pressure” – was on him Sunday, and he delivered.

At one point early in the second half, Northwestern trimmed a 10-point Iowa halftime lead down to six points, prompting head

coach Fran McCaffery to call a timeout to express his disgust. The Hawkeyes came out of that timeout reinvigorated, and White set the tone. He had a stretch where he scored seven straight Iowa points. He finished with 17 points, which was a game-high. White also had six rebounds and four assists. Whether it was at the offensive or defensive end of the floor, White took his game to another level.

What makes his performance significant though isn't so much what's he doing because he has always had the potential. It's that White's habits in recent days away from the spotlight are getting noticed more and more by his teammates.

Josh Oglesby, also a sophomore, referred back to the habits Matt Gatens showed as a senior last season starting to rub off on White. Senior forward Eric May, who was voted team captain before this season began, has even taken notice of White accepting more responsibilities and becoming as much of a vocal leader as he had been someone who led by example.

McCaffery said after Sunday's game when White plays like he did against Northwestern, it has a ripple effect on the rest of the team. The best evidence of this on Sunday was after White's stretch of domination, players like Oglesby and junior forward Melsahn Basabe started to heat up and Iowa ended up shooting 19-of-35 in the second half.

Should this win become the start of a run Iowa needs to have in order to have any discussion about the NCAA tournament surrounding it over the coming weeks, remember this performance. Because if the Hawkeyes keep winning, it'll probably be because White's an enormous reason for any future success.